"GT" 7/20/09

After 10 years of being together, Dion Corson, left, and Jeffrey Sealing decided to declare their love in vows during a ceremony Sunday at the Colorado Springs PrideFest. The festival drew hundreds of people to downtown for the event.

PHOTOS BY JERILEE BENNETT, THE GAZETTE

SHOWING PRIDE TO COMMUNITY

Gays and supporters turn out for the annual Springs event

BY MARIA ST. LOUIS-SANCHEZ
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See a photo gallery from PrideFest at **gazette.com**

Even when the sky opened up and rained on their parade Sunday, the Colorado Springs gay

ored flags, and local nonprofit organizations advertised themselves with floats

also marked how far they have come.

"This is the one day in Colorado Springs where we can walk around and people don't care who you are," said Stephanie Hinton, who was celebrating with her

JERILEE BENNETT, THE GAZETTE

From under their rainbow umbrellas, Christopher Curcio, left, and Elizabeth Osborne watched the Colorado Springs PrideFest parade Sunday.

PRIDEFEST: The world has evolved

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been active in the gay equality movement since the late 1960s, when he said he witnessed the Stonewall riots in New York City.

He said he was at the gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, when it was raided by police on June 27, 1969.

The bar's patrons rioted against officers that night and for several nights afterward.

The event was pivotal for the gay rights movement, Tree said.

"Back then it was illegal to serve alcohol to Native Americans and gay men," he said.

"The law's still on the books, but nobody pays attention to it anymore."

Tree is now a bartender at the Stonewall Inn and was invited to PrideFest to recount his story.

"We went through hell to get what you've got," he told the younger members of the crowd. "Don't screw it up."

Lois Benson and Jane Gazal have been a couple for 22 years and were married in San Francisco.

Through the years, they've watched as the world evolved. When they started their careers as teachers, they were both quiet about their sexual orientation. But by the time they retired a few years ago, their coworkers and bosses knew about their lives and supported them.

They also see more acceptance and support for younger people.

"The gay youth have much more support than we had when we were younger," Benson said. "As a whole, I think the community at large is more accepting, but a lot also depends on their family and individual situation."

The world has not changed as much as they might like, but for one day at least, they get to feel like it has.

Call the writer at 636-0274.